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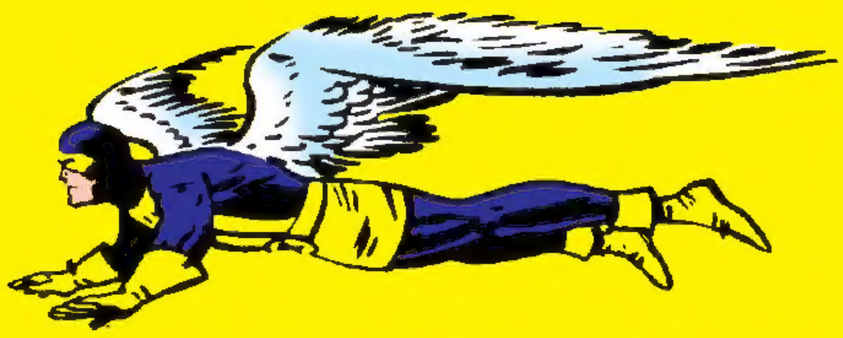
the X-MEN



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"THE SUPREME SACRIFICE!"

KIRBY & AYERS

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X-MEN! THE MOST MYSTERIOUS FIGHTING TEAM OF ALL TIME!

"The SUPREME SACRIFICE!""

IN WHICH A LIFE IS LOST... --A BATTLE WON!

THERE MAY BE A BETTER CREATIVE TEAM SOMEWHERE... BUT WE'VE NEVER FOUND 'EM!!

STORY: STAN LEE
PENCILLING: JAY GAVIN
DICK AYERS

LAYOUTS: JACK KIRBY
DELINEATION:
LETTERING: ART SIMEK

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LAST ISH, WE SAW THE AMAZING *PROFESSOR XAVIER'S* ASTRAL IMAGE DRIVEN FROM THE *SENTINELS' FORTRESS* BY DEADLY MICRO ELECTRIC BLASTS...

JUST *MADE* IT! ANOTHER FEW SECONDS, AND I'D HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO TAKE CONTROL OF MY PHYSICAL FORM AGAIN!

MY *X-MEN* ARE PRISONERS OF THE GIGANTIC *SENTINELS*, WITHIN THAT DEADLY FORTRESS...

...WHILE I LIE HELPLESSLY OUTSIDE -- UNABLE TO HELP THEM -- HARDLY ABLE TO DEFEND *MYSELF!*

BUT, I *CANNOT* FAIL THEM NOW! IT WAS *I* WHO ORGANIZED THEM -- WHO INSPIRED THEM TO RISK THEIR LIVES FOR MANKIND --

-- FOR THE SAME HUMAN RACE WHICH NOW HATES AND FEARS THEM -- ALL BECAUSE OF *DR. TRASK* AND HIS SENTINELS!

TRASK BELIEVED HE WAS DOING THE RIGHT THING! HE THOUGHT ALL MUTANTS WERE *MENACES!* HE CREATED THE SENTINELS TO *DESTROY* US, THINKING WE WERE THE ENEMIES OF HUMANITY!

HE HAD HIS SENTINELS CONSTRUCT THAT IMPREGNABLE FORTRESS -- HE ARMED THEM WITH DEADLY NEW WEAPONS -- FOR THE PURPOSE OF WIPING ALL MUTANTS FROM THE FACE OF EARTH!

HE WAS TOO BLIND, TOO FANATICAL TO REALIZE THAT THERE ARE BOTH GOOD AND BAD MUTANTS -- TO REALIZE THAT HIS *SENTINELS* ARE THE *REAL* THREAT TO -- *WAIT!!*

THE FORTRESS IS *SINKING* -- LIKE A GIGANTIC *ELEVATOR!*

IT'S COMPLETELY *HIDDEN* AGAIN -- CAMOUFLAGED BY A DECEPTIVE MOUND OF EARTH!

NOW MY X-MEN ARE *COMPLETELY* CUT OFF FROM ANY AID I MIGHT GIVE THEM!

THIS MEANS THAT THE MOST DANGEROUS SENTINEL OF ALL -- THE GARGANTUAN *MASTER MOLD*, CAN CONTINUE TO CREATE *MORE* SENTINELS -- UNTIL THEY OVER-RUN ALL OF EARTH!

--UNLESS I CAN *STOP* HIM! AND I *WILL* -- IF IT COSTS ME MY VERY *LIFE!*

BACK IN THE CITY THERE IS A *FALLEN* SENTINEL!* IF I CAN FIND OUT *WHY* HE FELL, I'LL HAVE THE KEY TO THEIR DEFEAT!

*REMEMBER HIM FROM *X-MEN #14?* --STAN.

DESPERATELY, PAINFULLY, DISREGARDING THE AGONY OF HIS INJURED BODY, THE CRIPPLED MUTANT TIRELESSLY CRAWLS INCH AFTER INCH, UNTIL HE REACHES...

THE HIGHWAY--AT *LAST!* NOW TO STOP THE FIRST PASSING CAR--!

A BASIC TELEPATHIC COMMAND WILL DO THE TRICK! NO NORMAL HUMAN CAN RESIST!

SLOW DOWN! STOP ONE HUNDRED YARDS AHEAD!

SECONDS LATER...

SURE IS LUCKY WE *SAW* YOU, FELLA! WHAT *HAPPENED?*

NO TIME TO EXPLAIN NOW! YOU MUST DRIVE ME TO THE CITY!

SURE! WE'LL BE *GLAD* TO!

THERE'S SOMETHING *ABOUT* HIM-- IT SEEMS TO *FORCE* US TO OBEY!

KINDA STRANGE THE WAY WE SLOWED DOWN IN TIME! ALMOST LIKE WE *KNEW* HE'D BE THERE!

MEANWHILE, BACK WITHIN THE NOW HIDDEN FORTRESS, WE FIND...

NOW WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO US?? IT'S HARD TO *MOVE* IN HERE--LIKE MY MUSCLES ARE MADE OF *LEAD!*

YOU'RE *RIGHT!* SOMETHING IS PRESSING US DOWN--SAPPING OUR STRENGTH!

I CAN'T EVEN FLY TO THE *TOP*-- MY WINGS CAN HARDLY *FLAP* IN HERE!

THERE'S ONLY ONE ANSWER-- THEY'VE FOUND A WAY TO INCREASE THE WEIGHT OF *GRAVITY* WITHIN THE GLOBE! AND THERE'S NO WAY FOR US TO *FIGHT* IT!

BUT, THE *BIG* QUESTION IS--WHERE ARE THEY *TAKING* US TO NOW--AND *WHY?*

FINALLY...

PLACE THE HEAVY-GRAV GLOBE UPON ITS PERMANENT BASE!

IT IS *DONE!* THEY SHALL BE SAFE HERE UNTIL THE *MASTER MOLD* GIVES US ORDERS FOR THEIR *FINAL DISPOSAL!*

NO MATTER HOW THEY STRUGGLE, THERE IS NO WAY TO OVERCOME THE IRRESISTIBLE POWER OF INCREASED *GRAVITY!*

THIS IS WHY WE ARE DESTINED TO RULE MANKIND! OUR COMPUTERIZED BRAINS CAN CREATE WEAPONS WHICH *NO* MERE HUMAN CAN MATCH!

BUT, INSIDE THE SEEMINGLY ESCAPE-PROOF PRISON, THE *"MERE HUMANS"* WITHIN ARE DETERMINED THAT IF THEY MUST BE DEFEATED, THEY'LL GO DOWN *FIGHTING--!*

MY POWER BLASTS CAN SHATTER ALMOST *ANYTHING!* WHY WON'T THEY SMASH THAT *GLASS???*

THUNG!

FOR LONG, ANGUISHED MINUTES, THE DEDICATED DEPUTY LEADER UNLEASHES HIS AWESOME POWER, UNTIL AT LAST...

IT'S NO USE! I--FAILED--!

THE WALL *ISN'T* GLASS, BUT SOME NEW, IMPREGNABLE SUBSTANCE--!

YET, PERHAPS THE *OTHERS*--BY USE OF *THEIR* MUTANT POWER--MAY DO BETTER--!

EASY, JEAN--EVEN IF YOU *CAN* LEVITATE YOURSELF--THERE'S NO PLACE TO *GO!*

THE TOP OF THIS DOUBLE-SIZED MILK BOTTLE IS ALL *SEALED UP!*

I *KNOW,* BOBBY--BUT I'VE *GOT* TO KEEP TRYING...!

WE CAN'T JUST SIT IDLY BY AND WAIT FOR THE *END!* WE MUST--*OHHH--!*

UH OH! I WAS *AFRAID* THAT WOULD HAPPEN!

THE PROF ALWAYS *WARNED* YOU ABOUT OVER-TAXING YOUR TELEKINETIC POWER!

BUT-- IF WE *DON'T* BREAK OUT-- WE-- WE'RE ALL *DOOMED!*

NOT IF *I* CAN HELP IT! I'M GONNA BUILD MY OWN KIND OF ICY *BATTERING RAM!*

I ALWAYS FELT *SUPERIOR* TO THE OTHERS, BECAUSE I COULD FLY! BUT, NOW I REALIZE HOW *USELESS* MY WINGS CAN BE AT TIMES...!

GOOD IDEA, BOBBY! IT'S THE ONE THING THAT MAY *DO* IT!

THERE! THE MORE ICE I ADD TO THE BAR, THE MORE *PRESSURE* IT EXERTS AGAINST THE WALLS--!

KEEP IT UP, PARTNER! THE SENTINELS ARE *SO CONFIDENT* THAT WE'RE TRAPPED, THEY'RE NOT EVEN PAYING ANY ATTENTION! DON'T STOP NOW--!

EACH CHUNK OF ICE I ADD MAKES ME THAT MUCH *WEAKER*-- BUT I GOTTA KEEP *DOING* IT! IT'S ALL UP TO *ME!*

THIS IS MY CHANCE TO PROVE THAT I MAY BE THE *YOUNGEST* X-MAN, BUT I CAN *STILL* PULL MY OWN WEIGHT ON THE TEAM!

YET, TRY AS HE MAY...

IT DIDN'T WORK! THE *ICE BAR* SHATTERED-- INSTEAD OF THE *WALL!*

CRACK!

I *FAILED* YOU! IT WAS ALL UP TO *ME,* AND I CONKED OUT!

DON'T EVER SAY THAT *AGAIN,* BOY!

YOU DID ALL THAT *ANY* MAN COULD DO-- YOU TRIED YOUR BEST!

YOU CALLED ME-- A *MAN*-- FOR THE FIRST TIME!

YOU'RE AS MUCH A MAN AS *ANY* OF US, BOBBY! NEVER FORGET IT!

NOW LISTEN-- *ALL* OF YOU! WE CAN'T SHATTER THAT WALL, AND WE'LL JUST DRAIN OUR STRENGTH BY TRYING! SO WE'LL MAKE NO MORE ATTEMPTS!

OUR BEST BET IS TO TAKE IT EASY-- CONSERVE OUR POWER-- AND WAIT FOR THE FIRST OPENING!

THEY'VE *GOT* TO OPEN THIS THING IN ORDER TO *GET* AT US-- AND *THAT'S* WHEN WE'LL STRIKE!

AT THAT MOMENT, IN ANOTHER CHAMBER OF THE VAST FORTRESS, THE AWESOME *MASTER MOLD* CONCLUDES HIS EXAMINATION OF THE UNCONSCIOUS *BEAST*...

I NEED LEARN NO MORE ABOUT HIM! I REALIZE NOW THAT THE *X-MEN* DO NOT POSSESS THE POWER TO HARM US!

WAIT! WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO *DO* WITH HIM...?

HE SHALL BE IMPRISONED WITH THE *OTHER* CAPTIVE MUTANTS, AS THE *MASTER MOLD* HAS COMMANDED!

THEN, AT MY PLEASURE, THEY WILL ALL BE *DESTROYED!* FOR THAT IS THE PURPOSE YOU YOURSELF HAVE PROGRAMMED INTO OUR COMPUTERIZED BRAINS!

NO! *NO!* I WAS *WRONG!* I REALIZE THAT NOW! *THEY* AREN'T MENACES TO MANKIND -- IT'S *YOU* WHO ARE! THEY MUSTN'T BE HARMED --!

SILENCE! THOUGH YOU *CREATED* US, YOU ARE MERELY A HUMAN! YOU TOO MUST *OBEY!*

WHILE I HAVE THE *POWER*, IT IS YOU WHO HAVE THE *KNOWLEDGE* TO CREATE A VAST *ARMY* OF SENTINELS FOR ME -- AND YOU SHALL *DO* SO!

NO! IT WOULD MEAN BETRAYING MY FELLOW MEN! YOU AND YOUR SENTINELS WOULD ENSLAVE ALL OF EARTH!

YOU HAVE NO *CHOICE!* HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN MY *POWER!* IF SO, BEHOLD THIS SIMPLE *DEMONSTRATION!*

YOUR *DISINTEGRATOR BEAM!!* DON'T DO IT -- *DON'T!*

DO NOT FEAR! *YOU* SHALL NOT BE HARMED--AS *YET!*

IT IS THE NEAREST *CITY* THAT WILL BE *WIPED OUT*-- AS EASILY AS I ERASE YONDER MACHINE!

AND *I* DID IT! I *GAVE* YOU THAT RAY!!

ZZZT!

I CANNOT ALLOW AN ENTIRE CITY TO SUFFER SUCH A FATE! I--I'LL *CREATE* YOUR ARMY OF SENTINELS!

AFTER ALL, WHERE THERE'S *LIFE*, THERE'S HOPE! WE MAY *STILL* FIND A WAY TO DESTROY THE MASTER MOLD!

FOR, WITH *HIM* GONE, THE SENTINELS WOULD BE *LEADERLESS*-- THE THREAT WOULD BE ENDED!

IF ONLY THE *X-MEN* WERE STILL FREE! IF ONLY I'D *LISTENED* TO THEM!

MEANTIME, BACK AT THE TV STUDIO WHERE THE FIRST SENTINEL HAD COLLAPSED FOR NO APPARENT REASON...

I DON'T GET IT! TRASK BUILT THESE BOZOS TO FIGHT THE X-MEN--

BUT THEN THEY CAPTURED TRASK *HIMSELF!*

TRASK WAS A *FOOL!* NO MAN HAS A RIGHT TO TAKE THE LAW INTO HIS OWN HANDS!

IF ONLY WE KNEW WHERE THEY *TOOK* HIM--AND HOW MANY *OTHER* SENTINELS THERE ARE! THEY MIGHT STRIKE AGAIN ---*ANY TIME!*

PERHAPS *I* CAN HELP YOU, INSPECTOR!

PROFESSOR XAVIER! YOU'RE THE ONE WHO WAS *DEBATING* WITH TRASK ON TV! *YOU* CLAIMED MUTANTS WERE *NOT* DANGEROUS TO MANKIND!

COME ON IN, MISTER! WE'LL TAKE ANY HELP WE CAN GET!

WHAT DO *YOU* KNOW ABOUT THIS *SENTINEL* HERE? HOW *DANGEROUS* IS HE?

MORE DANGEROUS THAN YOU CAN *IMAGINE!*--UNLESS WE CAN LEARN THE REASON THAT HE COLLAPSED!

YOU'RE NOT GONNA LEARN ANYTHING BY JUST SITTING AND *STARING* AT 'IM, ARE YOU?

HE CANNOT SUSPECT THAT I'M ACTUALLY *PROBING* DEEP WITHIN THE FIGURE BEFORE ME -- BY MEANS OF SHEER MENTAL ENERGY!

HE'S BUILT LIKE A GIGANTIC *TV SET!* HE WILL NOT RECEIVE A PICTURE PROPERLY IF THERE IS *INTERFERENCE!* SOMETHING HAS *INTERFERED* WITH HIM!

IF I COULD ONLY LEARN WHAT THAT SOMETHING *IS!*

LOOK, MISTER -- I WAS WILLING TO GIVE YOU A CHANCE -- BUT IF YOU JUST WANNA CATCH UP ON YOUR DAY-DREAMING, GO DO IT SOMEWHERE *ELSE,* HUH?

I SENSE SOMETHING AT *LAST* -- FROM OUTSIDE THE WINDOW! IF I CAN JUST MENTALLY *PINPOINT* IT, WE'LL HAVE THE ANSWER!

DO NOT *SPEAK,* INSPECTOR! GIVE ME JUST *ONE MINUTE MORE!*

WHAT ARE YOU POINTING AT THAT NEW *CRYSTAL PRODUCTS BUILDING* FOR? WHAT'S *THAT* GOT TO DO WITH ANYTHING?

THE GIANT *CRYSTAL* WHICH ADORNS THE TOWER! THAT'S *IT!*

WHEN THE SENTINEL STOOD BEFORE THE WINDOW, HIS TRANSMISSION BEAM WAS BROKEN -- BY THE CRYSTAL'S *INTERFERENCE!*

THEN -- IF WE MOVED HIM AGAIN -- HE'D COME TO *LIFE* ONCE HE WAS AWAY FROM THE WINDOW?!!

EXACTLY! BUT IT WOULD BE TOO DANGEROUS TO TRY! I HAVE A *BETTER* IDEA!

WE MUST DESTROY THE *SOURCE* OF HIS TRANSMISSION BEAMS -- AND AT LAST I KNOW HOW TO *DO* IT!

BUT, WE KNOW HOW ANXIOUS YOU ARE TO REJOIN THE *X-MEN* ONCE AGAIN, AND SO...

PLACE THE HELPLESS ONE WITH THE *OTHER* PRISONERS, UNTIL THE MASTER MOLD ORDERS THEIR *DISPOSAL!*

I OBEY, SECTION LEADER!

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OPEN THE GLOBE! I HAVE ANOTHER PRISONER TO BE DEPOSITED WITHIN!

LOOK! IT'S THE BEAST!

THEY'RE GONNA PUT HIM IN HERE WITH US!

THAT MEANS THEY'LL HAVE TO OPEN THE GLOBE!

THIS IS WHAT WE'VE BEEN WAITING FOR! REMEMBER OUR BATTLE PLAN!

WE ARE IN THE PROPER DEFENSIVE POSTURE!

THEN LET THE GLOBE BE OPENED!

THEY'RE TAKING NO CHANCES! THEY'RE RINGED ALL AROUND US!

-- THEIR LETHAL CHEST RAYS ARE ALL AIMED RIGHT AT US!

NO MATTER WHAT-- WE MUST CARRY OUT OUR PLAN!

KKKK!

THE GRAVITY IS GETTING LIGHTER--MORE NORMAL! GET READY--!

AN OPENING IS BEGINNING TO FORM!

WE'VE GOT TO BE DOUBLY CAREFUL--NOT TO INJURE THE BEAST!

IF WE FAIL, NOTHING WILL MATTER!

PERSONAL NOTE: FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO MIGHT WANT TO MAKE YOUR OWN HEAVY GRAVITY GLOBE, WE'LL JUST TIP YOU OFF THAT THE OPENING IS FORMED BY REPELLING THE ATOMIC PARTICLES WITHIN THE GLOBULE'S STRUCTURE! THERE--NOW THE REST WILL BE EASY!

SAY THE WORD, CYKE! WE'RE ALL SET!

IF WE WAIT TOO LONG, WE'LL MISS OUR CHANCE!

THEY'RE STARTING TO LIFT HANK OFF THAT STRETCHER--

JUST ANOTHER TWO SECONDS--TILL THEY'RE IN THE RIGHT POSITION--NOW!

MOVING WITH BLINDING SPEED, CYCLOPS BLASTS HIS POWER BEAM AT THE SENTINEL CARRYING HANK McCOY...

IT WORKED! HE DROPPED THE BEAST! LET'S GO!

ZAP!

RACING TO PREVENT THE X-MEN'S ESCAPE, THE OTHER SENTINELS TRIP AND FALL OVER THEIR STRICKEN COMRADE...

THE TIMING WAS PERFECT! THEY'RE GETTING ALL TANGLED UP!

I'LL LEAP OUT FIRST, TO MAKE THEM DIRECT THEIR CHEST RAYS AT ME! IT'LL GIVE JEAN AND THE OTHERS A BETTER CHANCE!

WHEW! LUCKY FOR ME THEY'RE SO SLOW-MOVING!

WHOOM!

BUT, WHAT'S KEEPING THE OTHERS?

WARREN! THEY'RE TRYING TO CLOSE THE OPENING AGAIN! IT'S ONLY BIG ENOUGH FOR US TO SLIP THRU ONE AT A TIME! HANK AND BOBBY WILL NEVER MAKE IT!

DON'T WORRY, JEAN! WE'RE NOT DESERTING THEM! YOU'LL SEE--!

OH, NO, YOU DON'T! YOU'RE NOT SEALING MY PARDS IN THAT GLOBE AGAIN!

STOP HIM!

BUT, HOW CAN YOU STOP THE UNSTOPPABLE ??!

SKRAK!

THERE! THAT'S ONE CONTROL PANEL YOU CAN KISS GOODBYE!

WHUMMB!

JUST WHAT I *HOPED* YOU'D DO! BY SWINGING AT *ME* AND MISSING, YOU SHATTERED A WHOLE WALL FULL OF *WEAPONS!*

THAT SENTINEL COMING TOWARDS ME--I-I CAN'T EVADE HIM--!

IF I CAN JUST USE MY TELEKINETIC POWERS AGAINST HIM-- TO FORCE HIM *BACK*--!

THERE! I SLOWED HIM DOWN! NOW-- JUST A LITTLE MORE--!

HIS *BODY* IS TOO HEAVY FOR ME--BUT, BY CONCENTRATING ON HIS *ARMS*, I CAN FORCE THEM BACK --FURTHER--FURTHER --THEY'RE MAKING HIM *TOPPLE*--!

HEY! JEANIE NEEDS SOME *HELP!* LET'S *MOVE!*

TOO LATE! I DOWNED HIM *MYSELF!*

YOU SURE *DID*, HONEY--BUT WE'LL MAKE SURE HE *STAYS* DOWN.!

I'M 'WAY *AHEAD* OF YOU, FLYGUY!

MAKE IT TOO SLIPPERY FOR HIM TO STAND, BOBBY!

I'VE GOT HANK! NOW, LET'S GO! EVERY SECOND COUNTS! WE'VE GOT TO DESTROY THE MASTER MOLD!

AHHH! TO BE ABLE TO SOAR AGAIN--!

BUT, DIRECTLY BEHIND THE SPEEDING MUTANTS, A NEW DETACHMENT OF SENTINELS APPEAR-- GRIM, EMOTIONLESS, POWERFUL--!

THEY MUST NOT ESCAPE! PREPARE STUN RAYS! AIM STUN RAYS!

AND NOW, AT MY COMMAND--

FIRE STUN RAYS!

KHOOOM

THEY ARE BEATEN! AND, IT SHALL BE FOR THE LAST TIME!

TOO LONG HAVE THEY DEFIED US-- FOUGHT US-- NOW, THEY MUST BE SLAIN! PREPARE DESTRUCTO-BEAMS!

BUT, NO SOONER ARE THOSE FATEFUL WORDS UTTERED, THAN THE ENTIRE BODY OF SENTINELS SUDDENLY SAGS TO THE FLOOR --AND LIES STILL!

AND, AT THAT MOMENT, FLYING HIGH OVERHEAD, WE SEE...

POLICE

POLICE

IF *XAVIER'S* THEORY IS CORRECT, THIS GIANT CRYSTAL, WHICH WE TOOK FROM THE TOWER OF THE BUILDING, WILL CAUSE ALL THE SENTINELS IN THE FORTRESS BELOW TO COLLAPSE AND BE RENDERED HARMLESS!

BUT HOW DO WE KNOW WE'RE NOT JUST WASTIN' OUR TIME? ALL I SEE BELOW IS A PATCH OF EMPTY COUNTRYSIDE!

YOU MAY REST ASSURED, GENTLEMEN, THE FORTRESS IS HIDDEN BENEATH THE SITE BELOW! CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN YOUR PRESENT FLYING SPEED--

-- IT IS *VITAL* THAT WE MAKE A STEADY, COMPLETE SWEEP OF THE AREA, TO BLANK OUT EVERY SENTINEL BELOW!

WE ALL THOUGHT THAT GUY WAS *OFF* HIS ROCKER, TILL WE GOT THE WORD FROM *WASHINGTON* ITSELF TO DO WHATEVER HE SAID!

I WONDER WHAT MAKES *HIM* SUCH A V.I.P.? ME, I NEVER *HEARD* OF 'IM!

BUT, THE POLICE PILOT'S PUZZLED MUSINGS ARE SOON RUDELY INTERRUPTED BY THE UNEXPECTED SIGHT WHICH SUDDENLY GREETS HIS EYES BELOW...

LOOK! THERE *IS* SOME KINDA *FORTRESS* DOWN THERE! IT'S POPPING UP OUTTA *NOWHERE!*

AND THERE'S A *WEAPON* OF SOME SORT BEING TRAINED UPON US!

ZZZZZZZ

IT'S CREATING A DEADLY *TURBULENCE* IN THE AIR! IF WE HIT IT, WE'LL *CRASH!*

THEN WE'VE GOT TO GO *BACK!*

NO! CONTINUE TO FLY! THERE WILL BE NO DANGER!

ON PROFESSOR XAVIER'S SAY-SO, THE COURAGEOUS OFFICERS FLY DIRECTLY TOWARDS THE AWESOME WHIRLWINDS, BUT-- AS THEY DO SO, THE ENORMOUS *CRYSTAL* DOES ITS WORK WELL--!

AS THE GLEAMING OBJECT PASSES ABOVE, THOSE OPERATING THE WEAPON CRUMPLE HELPLESSLY, CAUSING THE TURBULENCE TO FADE AWAY...!

THUS, WHEN THE *X-MEN* REGAIN CONSCIOUSNESS ONCE AGAIN, THEY FIND...

LOOK! THE SENTINELS! THEY'VE BEEN *KNOCKED OUT!*

I'M NOT COMPLAINING, BUT-- HOW DID IT *HAPPEN?*

ONE MINUTE WE WERE RACING TO THE MASTER MOLD-- AND THEN --*THIS!*

FROM THE EVIDENCE AT HAND, I WOULD DEDUCE THAT PROFESSOR X HAS FINALLY FOUND THEIR ACHILLES' HEEL!

HANK! YOU'VE *COME TO* AGAIN! HOW WONDERFUL!

AHH-- HOW GRATIFYING TO KNOW I'VE BEEN MISSED!

LET'S KNOCK OFF THE *TALK* TILL LATER! WE'VE STILL GOT A *JOB* TO DO--!

YOU'RE *RIGHT,* CYKE! SO LONG AS THE *MASTER MOLD* EXISTS, THE SENTINELS WILL *NEVER* BE DEFEATED! SO LET'S *GET 'IM!*

WARREN! BE *CAREFUL!* HE MUST HAVE ALL SORTS OF *DEFENSIVE DEVICES* PREPARED FOR JUST SUCH AN ATTACK!

LEAD ON, MACDUFF! WE'RE RIGHT BEHIND YOU!

THEY WON'T STOP US *NOW!*

JEAN'S *RIGHT,* ANGEL! SLOW DOWN-- WE DON'T KNOW *WHAT'S* AHEAD OF US!

THEN, AS IF TO ADD EMPHASIS TO THE X-MEN'S WORDS, THE LIGHTS SUDDENLY FLICKER OUT, PLUNGING THE ENTIRE AREA INTO DARKNESS...!

CAN'T SEE WHERE I'M FLYING! GONNA CRASH INTO--;UNHHH!=

LISTEN TO THAT *HUM*-- LIKE A TREMENDOUS SURGE OF *POWER*! SOMETHING IS DRAINING ALL THE CURRENT, BLOWING ALL THE FUSES--!

WHAT *IS* IT? WHAT CAN IT *BE*?

IT'S SOME SORT OF INCREDIBLY POWERFUL *MACHINE*! I CAN FEEL ITS TREMENDOUS *ENERGY* WITH MY *FEET*-- RIGHT THRU THE *FLOOR*!

AND, THE BOOK-WORMISH *BEAST* IS RIGHT! FOR, JUST A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY, WE SEE...

I HAVE GIVEN YOU ALL THE *POWER* YOU WILL REQUIRE! NOW, LET THE PROCESS *BEGIN*! THIS NIGHT SHALL MARK THE END OF MAN'S DOMINATION OF THE PLANET EARTH!

CREATE MY SENTINELS! I SHALL OBSERVE YOUR EVERY MOVE!

HEAVEN HELP ME!! I DON'T *WANT* TO DO IT-- BUT I *MUST*! OTHERWISE, A *CITY* WILL BE *DESTROYED*!

FIRST, THERE SHALL BE *EIGHT* NEW SENTINELS-- THEN, EIGHT MORE-- THEN, EIGHT MORE-- EACH NEW GROUP APPEARING FASTER AND FASTER-- UNTIL THEIR NUMBER MOUNTS SO QUICKLY THAT THEY BECOME VIRTUALLY *UNCOUNTABLE*!--*BEGIN*!!

IT'S STARTING TO WORK! THE SYNTHO-PARTICLES FROM THE MASTER MOLD ARE FLOWING INTO THE CUBICLES, SOLIDIFYING INTO SOLID MATTER!!

ONCE THE PROCESS HAS STARTED, THERE'LL BE NO ***STOPPING*** IT! IF ENOUGH ENERGY IS BUILT UP, THE MACHINE COULD RUN ***FOREVER!***

THEY'LL EVENTUALLY OUTNUMBER THE HUMAN RACE! THEY'LL ENSLAVE ALL OF MANKIND! THEY'LL BE THE MASTERS OF EARTH!

AND ALL BECAUSE OF ***ME!!*** IN MY IGNORANCE, MY FEAR, I CREATED AN EVIL FAR GREATER THAN THE MENACE IT WAS BUILT TO DESTROY!

THE FIRST UNITS ARE TAKING SHAPE ***NOW!*** THEN THEY'LL LEAVE THE CUBICLES AND THE ***NEXT*** BATCH WILL BE FORMED! AND ***ALL*** WILL BE OBEDIENT TO THE HEART-LESS ***MASTER MOLD!***

SO LONG AS MEN ENDURE UPON THE PLANET, ***MINE*** WILL BE THE MOST HATED NAME OF ALL--FOR IT WAS ***I*** WHO BETRAYED THE HUMAN RACE!

NO! I ***WON'T*** DO IT--I ***CAN'T!!*** I MEANT TO ***HELP*** MANKIND--TO PROTECT IT FROM THE MUTANTS--I CAN'T DESTROY IT ***NOW!***

STOP!! YOU CANNOT DEFY ME! HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN --THE ***PENALTY??***

NO--I'VE JUST ***REMEMBERED*** --REMEMBERED THAT MY OWN LIFE MEANS ***NOTHING!*** I'LL SACRIFICE IT GLADLY TO UNDO THE DREAD THING I'VE DONE!

THE ***IONIC POWER SOURCE!!*** IF YOU SHATTER ***THAT,*** YOU DESTROY ***EVERYTHING!*** EVEN ***I*** CANNOT SURVIVE--!!!

CLANG!!

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IT WAS I WHO CREATED YOU-- IT MUST BE MY HAND THAT DESTROYS YOU --ALONG WITH EVERY OTHER VESTIGE OF MY WORK--ALONG WITH MY OWN LIFE --UHHHHHH!!

KABOOM!

WE'RE TOO LATE! THE MASTER MOLD WILL NEVER MENACE HUMANITY AGAIN! SOMEONE'S DONE OUR JOB FOR US!

DR. TRASK!! WASN'T HE IN THERE--??

IF HE WAS, HE'S BEYOND ANY HELP NOW!

HEADS UP, GROUP! WE'D BETTER VACATE THESE PREMISES BEFORE WE'RE INUNDATED BY--- BOBBY!! WHAT'S WRONG??

THE HEAT!! DIDN'T REALIZE IT WOULD WEAKEN ME SO! BLACKING OUT--CAN'T STAND--!

IT'S IMPERATIVE THAT I CARRY HIM OUT--BUT HE'S TOO SLIPPERY TO HOLD IN MY HANDS--!

HOWEVER, THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SKIN A CAT--OR TRANSPORT AN ICEMAN!

ALL OF YOU-- LET'S GO!! THE PLACE IS COLLAPSING!

=WHEW!= YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO RESORT TO SUCH DRASTIC DEVICES TO PROVE YOUR POINT, SCOTTY!

HAKK!

BUT THEN, EVERYTHING SEEMS TO HAPPEN AT ONCE! EACH EXPLOSION CAUSES A *BIGGER* EXPLOSION--EACH FIRE STARTS A *BIGGER* FIRE--AS THE DESPERATE X-MEN SUDDENLY REALIZE THEY'RE SURROUNDED BY IMPENDING *DOOM!!*

WE'RE *TRAPPED!* THE ENTIRE *FORTRESS* IS CAVING IN! IF THE *FLAMES* DON'T GET US, THE *CAVE-IN* WILL!

JEANIE--STOP!! THERE'S A WALL OF *FIRE* DIRECTLY AHEAD OF YOU!

RUNNING IN PANIC WON'T HELP! WE'VE GOT TO WORK AS A *TEAM!!*

CYCLOPS IS *RIGHT!* ANGEL, YOU CAN *FLY* OVER THE FLAMES WHILE I USE TELEKINESIS TO *LEVITATE* SCOTT OVER THEM!

NO! THEN *YOU'LL* BE TRAPPED! I'LL WAIT HERE AND *CARRY* YOU OVER, AS SOON AS CYKE IS CLEAR!

ANGEL'S *RIGHT!* IT'S THE ONLY WAY! *HURRY,* JEAN! WE'VE GOT TO REJOIN HANK AND BOBBY!

THAT'S IT! BUT, BE CAREFUL! DON'T *STRAIN* YOURSELF!

EVEN WITH HIS OWN *LIFE* AT STAKE, HE WORRIES ABOUT *ME!* IS IT ANY WONDER I--FEEL ABOUT HIM--AS I DO--?!

HE'S *SAFE!* WE *DID* IT!

ANGEL--*CAREFUL!* THE FLAMES ARE *TOO HIGH!* IF YOU FLAP YOUR WINGS, THEY'LL CATCH ON *FIRE!*

DON'T MOVE!! I'LL HELP YOU GLIDE OVER *TELEKINETICALLY* --THERE--WE'RE *DOING* IT--!

THANKS, GAL! THAT WAS MIGHTY *CLOSE!* BUT, NOW THAT WE'RE *HERE*--WHERE *ARE* WE??

WE'RE NO SAFER--NO BETTER OFF--BUT, AT LEAST WE'RE *TOGETHER!*

JEAN, SEE IF YOU CAN PROBE THE WALL FOR ANY HIDDEN *ESCAPE-LOCK* DEVICES!

I'LL *TRY,* SCOTT!

THERE'S SOMETHING *HERE!* I CAN FEEL THE TUMBLERS! I'VE NEVER USED MY KINETIC POWER THRU A *WALL* BEFORE--BUT IF IT CAN BE DONE--*WAIT!* I HEAR THEM MOVING--I'M *GETTING* IT--!

THAT'S *IT!* IT'S *OPEN!* WE CAN MAKE OUR WAY *OUT* NOW!

CLICK!

WHILE OUTSIDE THE NOW FLAMING FORTRESS, WE FIND--

PROFESSOR--???

SAY, WHAT *GIVES* WITH THAT GUY?? HE HASN'T SAID A *WORD* TO ANYONE FOR THE PAST FIVE MINUTES!

RELAX, CHARLIE! ANY GUY WHO COULD FIGURE OUT A WAY TO STOP THOSE SENTINELS JUST BY FLYIN' OVER 'EM WITH A NUTTY SPARKLER --HE CAN BE AS QUIET AS HE *WANTS* TO!

BUT, NOT A MAN AMONG THEM CAN SUSPECT THE *TRUE* REASON FOR THE SILENCE OF CHARLES XAVIER --AS THE MOST POWERFUL MUTANT BRAIN ON EARTH DESPERATELY PROBES AMONG THE CARNAGE, SEEKING TO CONTACT THE X-MEN BELOW....!

WITH ALL THE EXPLOSIONS --ALL THE CONFUSION-- I COULDN'T REACH THEM! BUT NOW, I'VE LOCATED THEM AT LAST! I'LL STAY WITH THEM MENTALLY, TO GUIDE THEM...

DON'T BOTHER XAVIER, BOYS! IF HE WANTS TO SIT THERE SIGHT-SEEIN', THAT'S *HIS* BUSINESS!

BUT *LOOK!!* SOMEONE'S COMIN' OUT OF ONE OF THOSE OPENINGS!

WHERE? I DON'T SEE ANYTHING!

THAT'S FUNNY! NOW *I* DON'T EITHER!

NATURALLY! FOR I HAVE ERASED THE IMAGE FROM BOTH OF THEIR MINDS! NO NEED TO LET THEM KNOW MY *X-MEN* WERE INVOLVED!

SO FAR, SO GOOD! BUT WE STILL HAVE TO GET OFF THIS CLIFF! GIVE ME YOUR HANDS, CYKE!

WAIT!! WHAT ABOUT *JEAN?* HE CAN'T CARRY US *BOTH!*

DON'T WORRY ABOUT *ME!* I'LL *LEVITATE* MYSELF DOWN!

HAS IT EVER OCCURRED TO YOU WHAT SPLENDID *FIREMEN* WE'D MAKE?

WE'D BE THE PRIDE OF THE HOOK-AND-LADDER BRIGADE!

NOT *YOU,* GABBY! THEY'D NEVER FIND *BOOTS* BIG ENOUGH FOR THOSE TUG-BOAT TOOTSIES OF YOURS!

THAT, MISTER WORTHINGTON, WAS THE UNKINDEST CUT OF ALL! --UH OH! THE ENTIRE *CLIFF* IS BEGINNING TO QUIVER!

IT'S FORTUNATE THAT BOBBY THAWED OUT A BIT! NOW I CAN CARRY HIM SECURELY IN ONE HAND! IT'S MUCH BETTER FOR MY BESTIAL *IMAGE* THIS WAY!

HANK!! LOOK OUT!! THE CLIFF WALL IS *BUCKLING-- HOLD ON!!*

I'D BE DELIGHTED TO OBLIGE, SCOTTY-- EXCEPT FOR ONE THING--

--THERE SEEMS TO BE PRECIOUS LITTLE TO HOLD ON *TO* AT THE MOMENT!

IF ANY OF YOU STALWARTS WOULD CARE TO COME TO OUR ASSISTANCE, THERE'S NO NEED FOR RETICENCE!

IN OTHER WORDS-- *HELP!!!*

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HANG ON, HANK! NOW THAT SCOTT'S SAFE, I CAN RELIEVE YOU OF ICEMAN!

GET MOVING, PARTNER -- YOU HAVEN'T MUCH TIME!

I'M PAINFULLY AWARE OF THAT NERVE-WRACKING FACT, MY FRIEND!

AND THEN, WITHOUT THE ADDED BURDEN OF HIS YOUNG PARTNER IN HIS ARMS, HANK McCOY DEMONSTRATES THE UNBELIEVABLE AGILITY AND BALANCE WHICH HAVE EARNED HIM THE NAME -- THE BEAST!

AFTER ALL THOSE GRUELLING SESSIONS IN THE PROFESSOR'S DANGER ROOM, THIS IS ALMOST CHILD'S PLAY NOW!

SO LONG AS THERE'S A FOOT-HOLD, OR A TOE-HOLD ANYWHERE, MY CHANCES FOR SURVIVAL BECOME VIRTUALLY INCALCULABLE!

PLOP!

SALUTATIONS FROM YOUR BESTIAL BUDDY, COMRADES-AT-ARMS! I TRUST I DIDN'T DELAY YOU TOO LONG!

WOW! ARE YOU KIDDIN', HANK? THE ANGEL HIMSELF JUST LANDED A SECOND AGO!

THUNK!

WHUMP!

BEAST! ALL OF YOU! DON'T STOP! GET AWAY FROM THE CLIFF!!

BOY! THE PROFESSOR'S MENTAL WARNING DIDN'T COME A SECOND TOO SOON!!

THAT'S THE END OF THE SENTINELS -- AND THE MASTER MOLD! MANKIND CAN BREATHE EASY ONCE MORE!

I WONDER IF WE'LL EVER KNOW WHAT CAUSED THOSE EXPLOSIONS -- THE EXPLOSIONS WHICH SAVED HUMANITY?!!

PERHAPS THE TRUTH WILL ONE DAY BE KNOWN! BUT, UNTIL THAT TIME, IT LIES BURIED BENEATH COUNTLESS TONS OF RUBBLE -- BURIED IN THE BREAST OF DR. BOLIVAR TRASK, WHOSE LAST EARTHLY SACRIFICE BROUGHT THE WORK OF A LIFETIME CRASHING DOWN ABOUT HIM -- WHOSE LAST EARTHLY LESSON PROVED TO BE: BEWARE THE FANATIC! TOO OFTEN HIS CURE IS DEADLIER BY FAR THAN THE EVIL HE DENOUNCES!

THE END

BUT, NO VICTORY IS EVER TRULY COMPLETE! EVEN NOW, AS THE WEARY X-MEN PREPARE TO RETURN TO THEIR HEADQUARTERS BUILDING, NONE CAN SUSPECT THE SHADOW OF MENACE THAT AWAITS THEM -- THE MOST UNEXPECTED MENACE OF ALL -- AS WE SHALL SEE NEXT ISSUE! 'NUFF SAID!

MINUTEMEN

Blunt

Brian Azzarello